

I Can Do All Things Through Christ.

Text: Phil 4:13

Suggested Hymns:

Tan: 376, 358, 357, 285, 373

Ade: 376, 344, 358, 357, 373

1) The example of Paul

2) The Lord is our Strength

3) Strength through the Word and Sacraments

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Philippians 4:13, ¹³ *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“I can do all things.” How boastful that sounds! We do not like a boastful person. And, certainly, boasting is not acceptable to God.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. How different that sounds! There is no boasting here. In that statement we find a marvellous combination of humility and confidence. It shows a beautiful faith expressed in a glorious trust in the unfailing resources of a gracious and an omnipotent God.

“I can do all things through Christ.” God alone is omnipotent, and Christ is God. Yet the apostle Paul speaks here of that which might be called the omnipotence of faith, of a faith that is firmly established in Christ Jesus. These words tell of marvellous power and endurance. Let us therefore consider the words, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Example Of Paul.

Who is the man that spoke these words? Once he was known as Saul of Tarsus. What were his natural talents? He was not a physical giant, nor was he like Samson who could lift the pillars of a house by the strength of his arms.

But mentally he was keen and strong. His intellect was massive. Religiously he possessed great fervour and zeal. But his zeal was misdirected, his fervour misapplied, and his energies were misused so long as he was Saul of Tarsus.

The natural abilities which an all-wise God had given him were misused. However, it was not Saul of Tarsus who wrote and spoke these words of our text; it was the transformed man, Paul the Apostle.

In addition to his rich natural gifts he received spiritual gifts from God on the day of his conversion. The Holy Spirit came upon him, and he was made into a new man. He was given the right knowledge of God made manifest in Christ. He was given the correct understanding of God's plan for the salvation of his own soul, as well as for the redemption of a sin-lost world.

Yes, and even more, he was given a faith that rested in Christ and His perfect righteousness, a faith that supplied him with joy and peace, comfort and hope. And with such faith he was given strength, a spiritual strength, to which he was previously a stranger. In the possession of that strength he went forth to labour for Christ.

Yet we must not think that the fullness of that strength of which he speaks in our text was simply imparted to him on the day of his conversion. Such strength developed in many years of apostolic labours. His powers increased in the right use of his God-given talents, both natural and spiritual.

As his knowledge enlarged, as his faith grew, as his love expanded, as his courage increased, so his strength developed. And it is near the close of his ministry that he writes these marvellous words, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

Now, any one can say these words. But the proof is in the doing. Let us look at these words in the light of St. Paul's labours and afflictions. With regard to his labours we are amazed when we read the record in the Book of Acts.

It is more than astonishing what this one man did, the territory he covered, the manual work he did for his upkeep, the spiritual work of teaching and preaching, and visiting and praying, the congregations he gathered and watched over, the young ministers he trained and the epistles he wrote, — the total is beyond computation.

Truthfully, he declared in 1 Corinthians 15:10, ¹⁰ *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.* The zeal for his Lord whom he once had persecuted but whom he now loved

allowed him no more rest, than was absolutely necessary, to keep in working condition.

Day and night he was about his Master's business. No task was too difficult, no obstacle too great to be overcome. He feared no opposition however powerful. Relying wholly upon the strength which Christ would provide, he attempted and accomplished whatever task Christ assigned to him. Thus through his own experience, there was produced in him the divine conviction that enabled him to say, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* In other words, the apostle would say, *Christ in His strength can do anything through me that He wills to do.*

Not only could the great apostle do and dare, in the name and strength of Christ; he could also bear, suffer and endure. The more vigorously he laboured through the preaching of the Gospel to build up the kingdom of Christ, the more vehemently his enemies, Christ's enemies, opposed and persecuted him.

Wherever he went, he first delivered the Gospel of salvation in Christ to his own countrymen. Yet for the most part they rejected and persecuted him. Time and again they instigated an uproar against him.

Read the list of his sufferings and afflictions in 2 Cor. Chapter 11. Read how he was imprisoned, scourged, beaten with rods, and stoned almost to death. Read how he endured hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness and how he suffered a shipwreck and spent a day and a night in the deep. "*In deaths often*"¹ is his condensed statement, indicating that he was often near death in these exposures and persecutions. What strength of soul is required to undergo all of these afflictions and not to give up!

As the great apostle writes the words of our text, his trials and tribulations are not yet ended. He is in prison at Rome for the sake of Christ and His Gospel. He knows that martyrdom may be awaiting him. Yet his thoughts are not on himself, but with that devoted and beloved little band of Christians in far-away Philippi that so kindly and generously ministered to his needs.

He is concerned for them. He must cheer them. He must assure them that the turn which things have taken, is for the furtherance and not the hindrance of the Gospel. As Christ comforted His first disciples in the night of His betrayal,

so this great apostle cheers the believers whom he has in his heart. Read the entire epistle of Philippians. It will cheer and strengthen you.

Never did the great apostle reveal greater strength than during his imprisonment in Rome. Although bound in chains, his spirit refuses to be bound by the limitations of the prison. He teaches those who stand guard over him. He preaches to the few that visit him. Soon the Gospel of the crucified Saviour reaches into the very palace of Caesar. He writes encouraging letters. He prays for enemies and friends. He rises above all annoyances and hindrances. He maintains a sweet spirit, and a cheerful disposition. Not only is he calm and resigned in the face of an impending trial before unjust judges, but he is positively joyful. ***“Rejoice in the Lord always,”*** he writes to his beloved friends at Philippi. Then he adds for the sake of emphasis, ***“Again I will say, Rejoice!”***²

What, we properly ask, was the secret of such inward strength? The whole secret was in that wonderful name Christ. ***I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*** Christ, the Son of God, had loved him and given Himself for him. Christ, the Messiah of Israel, had sought him and found him and won him to Himself. Jesus, the Saviour, had brought him forgiveness, life, and salvation. Jesus removed from him the curse of the Law and the wrath of God. Jesus gave him a vision of the open heaven.

Jesus imparted to him a peace which he had never known. And in that heavenly peace Paul found strength, divine strength, strength to live and work, to suffer and die, for Christ. As Christ had given Himself for Paul, so Paul now gives himself to Christ. His life becomes identified with Christ.

Paul says in Philippians 1:21, ***“For me to live is Christ.”*** And then in Galatians 2:20, ***it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*** He is ***“in Christ,”*** and Christ dwells in him. Thus the strength of Christ becomes his for any duty that Christ may assign to him or for any cross He may give him to bear.

Evidences of this indwelling strength of Christ are found in the words immediately preceding our text, ***I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.*** And now he is ready for anything that God may have in store for him.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Marvellous words! Oh, that we all might repeat them after the great apostle!

2. The Lord Is Our Strength

Would we be boastful if we spoke these words? I repeat, we must not boast. We read in James 4:6, *“God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”* And yet we may boast. The psalmist declares in Psalm 34:2, ² *My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear of it and be glad.* While self-boasting is an abomination to the Lord, boasting in the name of the Lord is music to the angels, and to God Himself.

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,”*³ sang Mary. And every one who is called upon to undertake anything in the strength of the Lord should certainly magnify the name of the Lord. *Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together* exhorts the psalmist.⁴ *“In God we boast all day long,”* is another declaration of the psalmist.⁵

It is particularly of the strength of God, of the strength which God imparts to His own, that the Old Testament believers boasted. *“God is our Refuge and Strength.”*⁶ *“The Lord is the Strength of my life.”*⁷ *“The Lord will give strength to His people.”*⁸ *“They go from strength to strength.”*⁹

Then we read in Isaiah 40:29-31, ²⁹ *He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. ... those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; ... They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.* These are the declarations of those who by faith draw upon the limitless strength of God and make their boast in the Lord.

In that same spirit the believers of the New Testament make their boast of Christ and glory in His strength. *“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,”* Jesus said to His first disciples.¹⁰ And they did not venture forth on their Great Commission until they were endued with power from on high.

In the strength of Christ they preached before the mighty and the lowly. In the power of His Spirit they converted Jews and Gentiles. In the power of His name they performed miracles.

Read in Acts 3 how Peter and John disclaimed all credit for healing the cripple at the Temple gate and attributed the cure to the power of Jesus' name and wanted only His name to be glorified. In the power of His name they laboured and suffered, endured afflictions and persecutions. Like St. Paul, Peter also laid down his life in the strength of Christ as a testimony to the staying power of the Gospel.

In the days when the great persecutions swept over the Christian Church many a simple believer showed the spirit of St. Paul in the words of our text by proving that they could do all things for Christ in nobly confessing the saving power of His name before tormentors and sealing such confession with their blood.

Christ strengthened all these Christians, enabling them to be faithful unto death. A similar spiritual strength was displayed by Luther and some of his co-workers in the days of the Reformation. "*With might of ours can naught be done,*" they sang.¹¹ But in the strength of Christ Luther assailed the very citadel of Satan and prevailed. Truly Luther could say, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

Think of the labours and the sacrifices of the modern evangelists to the Gentiles, the missionaries to the heathen. Think of the power of paganism which they must attack. They can do it only in the strength of Christ. Consider what hardships they must endure, what persecutions they must suffer, for Christ and His Gospel.

Every true minister of the Gospel has the world and the devil arrayed against him. Every one who preaches Christ as the Light of the world thereby attacks the Prince of Darkness. The forces of hell are unleashed against the faithful witnesses of Christ.

But is this a word for apostles and ministers only? Certainly not! It was written to plain Christians at Philippi, to men and women who were still in the first stages of Christian knowledge and experience, who were anxious for the apostle's safety and concerned about the success of the Gospel.

To them St. Paul writes, "*Rejoice always*"¹² and then continues *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*"¹³ And to these plain Christians he also writes, *I can do*

all things through Christ who strengthens me. Surely he writes this for their encouragement.

From his example they are to learn to have the same confidence in Christ and to find strength in Him, which will enable them to do and dare, to bear and endure. Surely, then, these words are recorded also for our sakes. They are written for us all.

What, then, does it mean that you and I should be able to say, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* Certainly it cannot mean that we can do all those things for which divine omniscience and omnipotence are required. We cannot guide the sun, moon, and stars in their courses. We cannot control wind and rain. We cannot flash the lightning and roll the thunder. Such things belong to the omnipotence of God, and that power and glory He will not give to another.

Moreover, to have such power, the power over nature, would not make us better moral beings. Many a person who is a physical giant or an intellectual genius is a curse to his fellowmen. Very wisely God has reserved omnipotence to Himself. And it is good for us to always bear in mind how limited our powers are. Only like this will we remain humble. Only like this can God use us for His glory.

Yet in a very real sense every true believer in Christ can say with the great apostle *I can do all things through Christ.* Strengthened by Him, we can perform any duty which He assigns to us, be it in home, church, or business.

In these trying days of economic troubles and general disorder in the world many a Christian has been troubled and perplexed. Some have grown faint and weary. But there is no excuse for anxiety and despair. With the indwelling strength of Christ we can, like Paul, learn that *in whatever state I am, to be content.* We can rise above outward circumstances and rejoice in the Lord. And His peace will guard our minds and hearts.

In the strength of Christ we can resist the temptations of the world and of our own flesh and blood. In His strength we can overcome Satan himself, because Christ has already defeated him for us. By virtue of the indwelling strength of Christ we can lay off old faults and lay aside besetting sins and walk in newness of life.

As Christ strengthens us, we can refuse to be conformed to this world, and instead we can become more and more transformed into His likeness. What beautiful evidence of Christ's influence we can give to the world by living truly Christ-like lives!

With Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, we can render acceptable service in His kingdom. *“Without Me you can do nothing,”* Christ still says to His disciples.¹⁴ But, conversely, with Him we can do all things in His service.

3. Strength Through The Word And Sacraments

And lastly, when Christ fully possesses our mind and heart, as He did of Paul and the other apostles, we can also endure hardships for Him, undergo sufferings, bear afflictions, and, if need be, even death. ³⁵ *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...* ³⁷ *Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*

How, we rightly ask, is such triumphant strength obtained? Not in a moment, not by magic, nor is it to be had spasmodically only when wanted but otherwise despised. Such power from Christ comes only by the gracious and steady operations of His Spirit, through Word and Sacrament, and in answer to earnest and persistent prayer.

Such strength as that of which Paul speaks is developed only in a constant walk with Christ, in obedience to His will, in loving service to Him who gave Himself for us.

If we search the Scriptures little, if we commune rarely at the Table of the Lord, if we pray irregularly and faintly, is it any wonder that we know little or nothing of the indwelling power of Christ, and are therefore incapable of sustained service and so ill fitted to endure trials?

As we read the stories of some of the heroes of faith in the book of Hebrews, we are induced to say, *“I wish I could be like them.”* But are we willing to do as they did, to walk close with the Lord? Are we willing to pay the price?

We can even learn a lesson from our home-life. Look what a mother can do and endure. Often it seems well near miraculous. A child takes sick and lingers long in a serious condition. The mother, in addition to all her other home duties,

nurses that child, allowing herself no rest by day and little rest by night. What carries her through that trying period?

The answer is — love. And if she is a Christian mother, she has prayed to the God of strength for the additional strength needed; and she has trusted His promise, *“As your days, so shall your strength be.”*

Here we have the right combination of faith and love. Faith in God and love to the child God has given her. It is simply marvellous what we can do and can endure when possessed of faith and love. In increasing love to Christ who gave Himself for us we shall find increasing strength to serve Him in all the relationships of life.

With St. Paul *I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment,* ¹⁰ *that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,* ¹¹ *being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*¹⁵

May God *grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,* ¹⁷ *that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*¹⁶ Then you, too, will be able to say, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹ *to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*¹⁷

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Corinthians 11:23

² Philippians 4:4

³ Luke 1:46

⁴ Psalm 34:3

⁵ Psalm 44:8

⁶ Psalm 46:1

⁷ Psalm 27:1

⁸ Psalm 29:11

⁹ Psalm 84:7

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- 10 Acts 1:8
 - 11 Hymn 195
 - 12 1 Thessalonians 5:16
 - 13 Philippians 4:6
 - 14 John 15:5
 - 15 Philippians 1:9-11
 - 16 Ephesians 3:16-17
 - 17 Ephesians 3:20-21